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## On Your Bike

Callum Fairhurst talks to [Becca Challis](#) about helping others, tuk-tuks and cycling the world

Tuesday 24 January 2017



Images: Callum Fairhurst

It's strange to think that back in 2005 both Callum Fairhurst and I were in primary school together, only eight years old. Our biggest worries included progressing from a pencil to a pen, who could run fastest around the school field and swapping Pokémon cards. But suddenly things changed for the Fairhurst family. Callum's older brother Liam developed a limp. After going to the GP, Liam was diagnosed with Synovial Sarcoma within days; a rare high-grade soft tissue cancer in his left leg. The family's lives changed drastically as Liam was rushed to hospital to receive treatment.

Liam was two years older than Callum and an incredibly special boy in so many ways. Even now, almost eight years after his death, his smile remains famous. Liam's spirit, good nature and will to help others pushed him to achieve huge things in his short life, and his legacy is continued by his younger brother.

Whilst on the ward, Liam made friends with those around him. One of these friends was named Jack Wilkinson, a 12-year-old boy who Liam got on with brilliantly. Sadly, Jack passed away in 2006. Mourning the loss of his friend, Liam decided that he wanted to help other people like himself and Jack and so he planned to begin fundraising. He decided that he would do a one-mile swim for the charity CLIC Sargent.

I remember 'Liamsmile' being advertised on StarRadio Cambridgeshire and thinking how incredible it was that an 11-year-old boy battling cancer could swim a mile in under fifty minutes. It is only now, however, that I truly appreciate just how incredible Liam's efforts were, considering he had lost over seventy-five per cent of his thigh muscle due to his treatment. He raised £20,000 despite being unable to walk further than one hundred yards. He told his family "No matter how long it takes I'm not getting out of the pool till I've done it!"

This was just the beginning. Liam had set his mind to raising even more for those in need. In the same year, Liam appeared on ITV's *Fortune: Million Pound Giveaway*. He convinced a panel of five millionaires to part with £50,000 to purchase and equip a luxury caravan for families affected by cancer, so that they could have short breaks away from hospital.



During this time Liam underwent numerous courses of chemotherapy and radiotherapy to try and halt the illness. However, during routine scans in March 2007, tumours were detected in both of his lungs and his condition was now regarded as terminal. Liam refused to accept this, seeking second opinions which often resulted in further treatment.

He decided not to disclose his terminal diagnosis publicly. He wasn't looking for sympathy; he wanted people to be proactive – an incredibly mature decision for a 12-year-old. Members of the local community took up his cause and began fundraising events in his name. He received the *Diana Award* from Prince William and the *Child of Courage Award* at the 2008 *Pride of Britain Awards*.

On the 30th June 2009, Liam passed away. Alone, he had raised £340,000, plus a further £7 million by heading a campaign for charity. Despite his own struggles, Liam's sole aim had been to help others. His focus was on bringing joy to other children who were going through the same thing as him, to bring joy to his family and most of all to focus on the good and keep fighting. His quote to live by was: 'Life is measured in achievement, not in years alone'. Liam's short life was certainly a testament to that.

At the time of his passing, many people took to Twitter to remember him. Richard Branson wrote 'Liam was an incredible young man who achieved so much in his short 14 years on this earth.' Russell Brand added 'Liam Fairhurst you beautiful, brave young man, rest in peace.' Gordon Brown remembered 'It was a privilege to meet him... His courage will be a continuing inspiration to all those that knew him.' When I ask Callum who his biggest inspiration is, "Without a doubt Liam" is his answer before I even finish the question. He adds, "He's someone that epitomizes everything great about humanity. When you're going through tough times you go and inspire others. Liam had an amazing warmth about him." Before Liam died Callum promised him two things: to live a great life and to help others. At the age of 19, Callum has already achieved this hundreds of times over.

Callum's entrance into fundraising was an incredibly personal one. Wherever Liam fundraised, Callum was there shaking a bucket, speaking to people about his brother's cause. He began to do challenges in order to raise money: abseiling down buildings, the 'Twycle' which involved cycling from John o'Groats to Land's End, as well as the huge challenge of setting up a charity, the *Liam Fairhurst Foundation*, or *LFF*.



The main aim of the *LFF* is 'To help young people affected by cancer, disabilities and illness'. They offer grants to families who are affected, allowing parents to have time off or even give up work to look after their child. They also offer grants to other charities which share their aims, one of which is 'Sunflower Care', a charity that provides respite care for young people. A grant from the *LFF* to them funded a fully functional sensory room and parts of a sensory garden. The *LFF* also sponsors the 'Disney Project', sending 20 families to Disneyland so that they have a break from the stresses and strains of hospital life. Their motto is 'Sometimes tomorrow is too far away, The Liam Fairhurst Foundation helps children be children and live for today.'

Callum does not always stick to traditional fundraising techniques. His challenges have become famous in Cambridgeshire. He is ambitious and imaginative in planning them and his greatest to date is 'Challenge 360' - his cycle around the world. Callum travelled for 9 months through 16 countries, travelling 60 to 90 miles a day and a total of 17,342 miles.

In doing this, Callum raised over £25,000 and divided it between the *LFF* and other international charities: 'Free the Children' who change the lives of children in India and the 'Serious Fun Network' who run fun camps in America for children living with serious illnesses. 'Camkids', a Cambodian Children's Charity, used the money Callum donated to fund an entire year group named 'Grade Liam' to go through school. All of this, as well as continuing to support families affected by illness and disability in the UK. Callum confirms that the challenge is his "biggest achievement to date", adding that "Anyone can physically do that cycle but some people wouldn't survive the emotional strain of it."

Naturally, the cycle was incredibly challenging. Callum tells me, "Of course there's the inevitable tough day with massive mountains... but at the same time there's also the emotional challenge, particularly as it was my first time completely away from home without anyone." Callum travelled out to Australia with his best friend Vicky, who cycled with him across the country, but things became harder when Vicky left: "I went to New Zealand and I suddenly found it really tough."



Not only was Callum beginning to feel homesick, but he did the majority of his journey alone, staying with local people along the way. He was faced with massive headwinds which “were the worst – I’d prefer a mountain to a headwind”, but it was the days that were both “emotionally draining and physically draining that hit you like a brick.” Callum embraced different climates, terrains and a whirlwind of cultures, recording the people that he met along the way both on social media and by asking people to sign his bike, documenting his journey on the frame of his bicycle.

On what would have been Liam’s 21st Birthday, Callum was in Florida, a nostalgic setting as after Liam passed away friends and family had clubbed together to send Callum and his family to Disneyworld. Callum posted a video on Facebook calling for people to commit a ‘Random Act of Kindness’ in remembrance of Liam, to put a smile on someone’s face just as Liam used to do. Facebook was filled with photos of flowers that people had received, others putting money down in coffee shops to cover the next three drinks.

Callum kept his family and friends up to date through his blog and Facebook. One post described his difficulties in an American airport, with many of those following his journey rallying together to try and come up with a solution. Callum had missed his final flight from Miami to Atlanta, after which he would cycle the remaining 862 miles to New York over the next few days. The flight had been rescheduled weeks before but no one had been in touch with him, resulting in him missing his transfer by just five minutes.

Stuck in Miami, Callum was told that he would need \$400 for his new ticket plus a \$150 fee for his bike. He was low in funds and the airline was at fault for changing the schedule without informing him. Thankfully, after several hours, the fees were waived. Callum was on his way, but he was severely delayed. Yet after all the upset, he was able to spend his flight in business class as it was the only seat available!



I wondered why Callum had been so drawn to cycling. He gives two reasons: “Firstly, I can’t run. Secondly, you can see more than when you’re running. It’s something that I’ve just fallen into and I’m comfortable with.”

Callum has done some other incredible things for his charity. There is an annual parachute jump that lots of people are involved with, as well as a Go-Karting challenge, one of Liam's favourite activities. He has met the former Prime Minister David Cameron multiple times to promote the charity and he held a reception for the *Foundation* with George Osborne in Downing Street.

Just like Liam, Callum has now received the *Diana Award*. However, he emphasises that his challenges are "a tiny, tiny aspect of everything that goes on in the *Foundation*." Other people have fundraised in a variety of ways such as bake sales, fun runs and even Lego walks in shopping centres instead of fire walks.

Callum juggles his work as a first-year Politics student at UEA with his latest challenges and running the charity. I ask him how he manages this. "Well, I think the juggle is becoming much more of a struggle" he says, bursting into laughter at the unintentional rhyme. He adds, "I have a lot of support from many different volunteers across the country and they really are the blood of the charity, supporting us in many ways ranging from admin to fundraising." He jokes that "at the same time my university course doesn't have all that may contact hours," emphasising that he still manages to keep up with *House of Cards* like any other university student.

Callum's love of politics also featured heavily in his gap year. Whilst the first half was taken up by his world cycle, the second featured him working as a Policy Advisor for the Cabinet Office. He applied for the job whilst on his cycle and soon after returning to the UK moved to London to work for the government. A lot has happened in politics in the last six months and this is something Callum highlights: "It was an amazing experience to be thrown into the real world of work and to be at the heart of government in such an exciting and crazy time for British politics."

I ask him how he felt about the current state of politics and he laughs; I've asked an impossible question. Always a considered speaker, he replies, "I hope politicians listen to the people, but it's also the responsibility of the general public. Do what you say, if you're passionate about something follow through with it. Don't just get angry at watching a TV debate, get out there and debate, get out there and change things and hopefully that is the way we will be represented."

When I ask, Callum is particularly secretive about any upcoming challenges. "All I can say," he tells me, "is that I've bought a tuk-tuk." He's currently taking motorcycle lessons "which is mad because in order to drive a 40mph tuk-tuk, I have to drive a motorcycle more powerful than a Ferrari."

He does tell me about his '55 in 5 years' project. Every five years Callum writes a list of 55 challenges he wants to complete: 'It ranges from small things like shearing a sheep right through to meeting the Pope. Or on my last five-year challenge was to cycle the world. I think it's important to challenge yourself everyday with different activities and if you give yourself a list hopefully you're likely to achieve it.' The latest list features activities such as flying a paramotor, visiting every European country before Britain leaves the EU and wing walking. Another of his ambitions is "to go across the USA in a school bus, picking up random strangers en route." He explains: "They have to give me a story to have a free ride on the bus. They choose wherever they go, any distance, even from Texas to California. I would start to develop a route, people would come on board and tell me their stories, people leave the bus, people get on the bus and then I would write a book about the stories and the journey itself."



Callum is a busy guy with a huge imagination. He has achieved magnificent things and he continues to be inspired by a huge range of causes. His story, and Liam's work has resulted in the establishment of a foundation that brings joy to young people and helps to bring light to those who are suffering. Callum

urges people to get involved and help with his cause, 'You can be in York and do it, you can be in Scotland and do it; we've got people from Australia and America. You can be across the other side of the world - we just want people to get involved, fundraise for us and spread the message about what the *Liam Fairhurst Foundation* wants to do and what the *Liam Fairhurst Foundation* is doing.' **M**



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